

What is "bird flu"?

Bird flu is also called avian influenza, avian flu, or H5N1. It is an infection in birds caused by the influenza virus. Many different types of bird flu viruses occur naturally in wild birds. Most do not cause illness. Bird flu viruses can cause serious illness and even death in birds. Rarely, other animals and people are infected with bird flu.

How are Seasonal Flu, Bird Flu and Pandemic Flu different?

Seasonal Flu: We've all had it. It's the flu we catch from our family, friends and co-workers. It is a respiratory infection caused by influenza viruses, spread when infected people sneeze or cough. About 36,000 Americans die every year from the flu.

Bird Flu: Many "bird flu" viruses occur naturally in domestic poultry and some wild birds, especially waterfowl and shorebirds. The bird flu in the news is known as "H5N1" and is different because it is more deadly than most bird flu viruses. Infected birds can spread the virus through bodily fluids to other birds. It can also spread to other animals including pigs, cats and very rarely to humans. Many people who catch bird flu live or work closely with infected birds.

Pandemic Flu: A virus that spreads around the world between humans is called a "pandemic." Pandemics can spread rapidly around the world in only a few months. The Bird Flu does not spread easily between people now, but it could change (mutate) into a form that spreads easily from person to person. No vaccines are available now, but scientists are working to develop one as soon as possible.

What is H5N1?

H5N1 is a type of bird flu virus that appeared in Asia during 2003. This bird flu has caused sickness and death in both wild and domestic birds. Millions of domestic poultry have died or been destroyed to control the spread of this disease. This bird flu has spread from Asia to Africa and Europe. Very few people have been infected with bird flu.

What do the H and N stand for in H5N1?

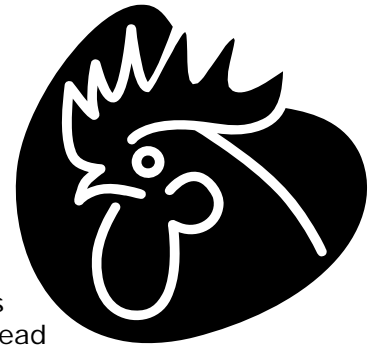
The H and N are letters that stand for proteins on the surface of the flu virus. All flu viruses are named using the letters H and N to describe the surface proteins. The letter H is for a protein called hemagglutinin and the letter N is for a protein called neuraminidase. There are 16 known H proteins and 9 known N proteins.

What types of birds will the County test for bird flu?

- The County Veterinarian will test dead or ill poultry and selected waterfowl for bird flu
 - Waterfowl are birds that have webbed feet and broad bills/beaks
 - They are often found in the water
 - Ducks and geese are common types of waterfowl
- Consult with your veterinarian for pet bird testing

What should I do if I find 3 or more dead wild waterfowl in the same general area?

- Report the birds to the Dead Bird Hotline at 888-551-INFO (4636).
 - The birds must be relatively fresh and have died within the last 24 hours
 - The birds should not be stiff
 - There should be no ants, flies or maggots covering the bird
 - The birds should not have a foul odor
 - There should not be any missing body parts or physical injuries



- If the birds do not meet these criteria or there are fewer than 3 dead birds found, please dispose of the dead birds by double bagging them in plastic bags and discarding them in the garbage
- Use gloves or a shovel to avoid touching the birds or any other dead animal with your bare hands
- Wear eye glasses, goggles or face shields if there is a reasonable chance of being splashed while handling the birds, such as if the birds are wet, or large, or covered in feces
- Wash your hands with soap and water after disposing of the dead birds

How is the bird flu spread from bird to bird?

- Healthy birds become infected from direct contact with sick birds, or contact with areas or objects contaminated by sick birds
- Contaminated equipment, vehicles, feed, cages, or clothing, especially shoes can carry the virus from farm to farm and then infect new birds
- Markets where live chickens and other birds are sold under crowded and sometimes unsanitary conditions have been a location for spreading the bird flu in other countries

How is bird flu spread from place to place?

- Wild migratory birds spread bird flu around the world
- In Asia, most of the spread is probably a result of live birds at markets
- Illegal movement of birds or bird products may spread bird flu

What are the signs of bird flu in birds?

- Decreased activity
- Low or reduced egg production
- Facial swelling with large and bluish-violet colored combs and wattles
- Gasping for breath or difficulty breathing
- Weakness/paralysis
- Diarrhea
- Sudden death
- Some birds are infected but never show signs of illness

What can people do?

- Get educated about bird flu
- Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water before and after handling raw chicken meat, raw poultry or raw eggs
- Clean kitchen surfaces and utensils before and after use
- Cook chicken and other poultry products to 165°F (74°C)
 - Use a probe-type food thermometer available at grocery stores
 - Check the internal temperature in the innermost part of the thigh, wing, or the thickest part of the breast
- Cook eggs thoroughly, no runny yolks
- Do not let chickens or other domestic birds roam free, keep them in covered cages or pens
- Practice good biosecurity (see what I can do to protect my birds)
- Keep chickens, ducks and pigs in separate areas, cages or pens
- Do not catch, touch, or keep wild birds
- Report any unusual bird deaths or illnesses to the Dead Bird Hotline (888) 551-4636

Is it safe to eat chicken, poultry and eggs?

- Yes, it is safe to eat properly cooked poultry and eggs in the US.
- Cooking poultry products to 165°F (74°C) kills germs, including the bird flu virus
 - Use a probe-type food thermometer available at grocery stores
 - Check the internal temperature in the innermost part of the thigh, wing, or the thickest part of the breast

- Use safe food handling techniques to control the spread of germs from poultry
- Keeps hands, utensils, and surfaces clean by washing before and after use
- The bird flu has not been found in the U.S.
- The U.S. bans imports of poultry from areas with bird flu
- The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) does not allow sick birds to enter the food chain for people to eat
- For more information on safe food preparations, call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline at: 1-888-MPHotline or 1-888-674-6854

PET BIRDS

Does having a pet bird increase the risk of catching or spreading bird flu?

- Taking steps to protect your pet bird is the best way to decrease the risk of catching or spreading bird flu
- Birds do carry a risk of becoming infected with bird flu
- If you already own a pet bird, keep it inside to avoid exposure to wild or migratory birds
- If you are buying a new bird, especially exotic birds, check to be sure the bird has been imported legally
- It is illegal in the U.S. to import pet birds from places that have the bird flu
- Smuggled birds from bird flu countries could bring the disease to the U.S.
- Information about federal embargoes on bird importation can be found at [CDC Bird Embargo Page](#)

What can I do to protect my pet birds from bird flu?

- At this time the bird flu has not been found in the U.S.
- Take steps now to protect your birds before the bird flu comes to the U.S.
- Measures you can take to protect your birds from bird flu viruses and other diseases are called biosecurity. These steps include:
 - Restrict access to your property and your birds
 - Keep your birds areas clean
 - Keep a pair of shoes and a set of clean clothes to wear only around your birds in a covered container at the entrance of your bird area
 - Clean and disinfect vehicle tires, poultry cages, and equipment after visiting other locations that have birds, including the feed store
 - Do not share birds, lawn and garden equipment, tools, or poultry supplies with your neighbors or other bird owners
 - Consult with your veterinarian if you have sick pet birds

Can I get my pet bird tested for bird flu?

- If you are concerned about your pet birds, consult with your veterinarian

OTHER PETS

Can bird flu virus spread to my pet dog and cat?

- Cats can get the bird flu. In countries with bird flu outbreaks, only a few cats have gotten the bird flu
- No known cases of human bird flu have been from cats
- There is no evidence that dogs can get sick with bird flu
- There have been reports of a dog flu virus in the U.S. but that is a different flu virus that affects dogs only

Is there a vaccination for pets?

- There is no vaccination currently for animals or humans

What animals can be infected with bird flu?

- All birds

- Pigs, tigers, leopards, ferrets, and domestic cats
- Germany reported an infection in a stone marten (a weasel-like mammal)
- Bird flu and all flu viruses are always changing and it's possible that other animals could get sick

WILD BIRDS

What is being done to monitor bird flu in wild birds?

- Several agencies are monitoring for bird flu among wild birds, especially migratory waterfowl such as ducks and geese
- Monitoring is being strengthened in certain parts of the country such as Alaska because it is believed that migratory birds could carry bird flu there from Asia and Russia
- A fact sheet about the ecology of bird flu viruses in wild bird populations can be found at [National Wildlife Health Center](#)

Is it safe to have a bird feeder and a birdbath in my yard?

- Maintaining a clean bird feeder or birdbath is generally safe, unless they are attracting rodents or raccoons
- Wear protective gloves when handling or cleaning these items to avoid contact with bird droppings or contaminated water in a birdbath
- Always wash your hands with soap and water after doing these chores
- Do not allow pets or children to play in, or drink the water from a bird bath
- If you own pet bird, it is not recommended to attract wild birds to your property

Do wild bird droppings pose a risk for bird flu?

- Always use caution when cleaning bird droppings
- Bird droppings can be infected with other diseases, not only bird flu. For more information, go to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website](#)
- A bird must be infected with bird flu for their droppings to be a risk
- Wear gloves and wash your hands with soap and water after cleaning droppings

Can the virus stay alive on handrails or other places where birds have been?

- Yes, the virus can stay alive on objects, but only for several hours
- In different environments such as in a cold pond, it can stay alive for days or weeks
- Good hygiene is an important way to protect yourself when you are concerned about contaminated places and objects

GAME BIRD HUNTERS

Is it safe to hunt or eat wild birds?

- Hunting and eating wild birds can be safe if proper precautions are used
- Hunters should use good hygiene while hunting, cleaning, and preparing game for the table

What can hunters do to protect themselves against bird flu?

- Use rubber gloves when you clean birds
- Do not eat, drink or smoke when you clean birds
- Keep your hands away from your face and mouth when you handle birds
- Wash your hands with soap and water after you touch birds
- Wash your knife, and work area with soap and warm water after you clean or cook birds
- Cook birds to 165°F (74°C) to kill germs, including the bird flu virus
 - Use a probe-type food thermometer available at grocery stores
 - Check the internal temperature in the innermost part of the thigh, wing, or the thickest part of the breast

How can hunters help?

- Wild bird hunters are likely to be the first people to find birds infected with bird flu

- Hunters should report dead or ill waterfowl to the Dead Bird Hotline: 888-551-INFO

POULTRY & BACKYARD BIRDS

I have a small flock of chickens in my backyard. Are there any special precautions I should take to protect them from getting and spreading bird flu?

Yes, backyard birds are the most at risk for contact with infected wild birds. Large poultry producers use strict measures to limit contact with wild birds. This is called biosecurity. Small backyard flocks should use the same precautions to protect their birds and to prevent the spread of the virus:

- Use good sanitation
- Reduce exposure to wild birds
- Report sick and dead birds in your flock to the Dead Bird Hotline (888) 551-4636
- Protect your birds from bird flu viruses and other diseases by using biosecurity measures:
 - Restrict access to your property and your birds
 - Keep your bird's areas clean
 - Keep a pair of shoes and a set of clean clothes to wear only around your birds in a covered container at the entrance of your bird area
 - Clean and disinfect vehicle tires, poultry cages, and equipment after visiting other locations that have birds, including the feed store
 - Do not share birds, lawn and garden equipment, tools, or poultry supplies with your neighbors or other bird owners
 - More information on "backyard biosecurity for the birds" is available www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/birdbiosecurity/hpai.html

What is being done to monitor and stop the spread of bird flu among domestic poultry in this area?

There is worldwide coordination to control the spread of bird flu

- Domestic poultry flocks are routinely monitored for bird flu
- Potentially infected birds are separated from the rest of the flock
- Sick and potentially infected birds are killed
- San Diego County is preparing by using a coordinated plan for bird flu
- The County Veterinarian has been testing birds for over 20 years to look for bird flu viruses
- Early detection of bird flu will help limit the spread. Reporting of ill or dead birds is very important to finding the bird flu when it gets to San Diego County

Is it safe to live near people with chickens and poultry in their backyards?

- Living near birds is not enough to get sick with the bird flu
- Humans get the bird flu from very close contact with birds such as butchering infected birds, or being exposed to infected bird droppings

What are the signs and symptoms of bird flu in chickens?

Bird flu causes a wide range of symptoms in birds, ranging from mild illness to a highly contagious and rapidly fatal disease resulting in severe epidemics.

- Decreased activity
- Drastic decline in egg production
- Facial swelling with swollen and bluish-violet colored combs and wattles
- Hemorrhages on internal membrane surfaces
- Gasping for breath
- Weakness/paralysis
- Diarrhea
- Sudden death

What can poultry workers and bird handlers do to protect themselves?

- Poultry workers need to get instructions from their employers about protecting themselves from bird flu
- Preventing domestic poultry from getting bird flu is the best way to protect poultry workers and handlers
- People and other traffic should be controlled and limited to only necessary staff on poultry ranches
- Practice proper hand washing, cleaning and disinfection procedures
- Report any unusual death or illness of chickens and other birds to the Dead Bird Hotline (888) 551-4636
- Report any illness among the workers in poultry farms to the Health Department

PROTECTING PEOPLE

How are people getting sick from the bird flu?

- The bird flu virus is found in the blood, saliva, nasal discharge and droppings of infected birds
- People who have gotten sick have handled sick birds, their blood, saliva, or droppings
- Standing close to a sick bird will not get you sick
- There have been no sick people linked to cooked poultry products
- Human infections in other countries may be due to different living conditions:
 - Families frequently raise birds for their own food
 - Ducks and chickens often roam freely and contaminate the neighborhood
 - Living areas are heavily contaminated by birds and their droppings
 - Human infections also occurred from slaughtering and preparing live birds for food
 - At this time, this disease is not easily spread to people

Although rare, human cases of bird flu have been reported.

- All human cases of bird flu have been in Asia, Middle East, and Eastern Europe.
- Most human cases probably came from direct contact with infected birds or their droppings
- A few cases are linked to drinking uncooked poultry blood

Will the flu shot protect me from the H5N1 type of bird flu?

- The flu shot for humans protects against seasonal human flu viruses, not bird flu viruses
- Scientists are working to develop a vaccine for the bird flu in case it becomes a threat to humans

What can I do to protect my family and me from bird flu?

Unless this virus changes so that it spreads easily from person to person, it is not likely to become a significant threat to people living in the U.S.

There are general precautions that can be taken to reduce the chance of getting sick from any disease carried by animals:

- Wash hands after contact with animals
- Avoid contact with animals that appear to be sick, including birds
- Thoroughly cook eggs and meat prior to eating, and wash all utensils and preparation areas thoroughly with soap and hot water
- Wash hands frequently especially if preparing food or after touching animals
- Owners of domestic livestock, including poultry and waterfowl, should contact their local veterinarian if any of their animals appear sick
- Hunters should hunt and process only healthy-appearing animals and should wear gloves when handling any animal